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T H E
H I S T O R Y
O F T H E
Remarkable L I F E
Of the Renowned
CHARLES XII.
King of Sweden.

Giving an Account of his many Sieges and Battles with the Kings of Denmark and Poland, and the Czar of Muscovy. His Flight into Turkey, and his Behaviour at Bender. With the Manner of his Death, at Frederickshall, in Norway.



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The LIFE of CHARLES XII.
King of Sweden.

THIS Prince was born in 1681, and even at six years of age began to shew a disposition for martial deeds, and discovered what he would one day be. He came to the crown in 1697, under the guardianship of his mother till he was eighteen years of age; but a few months after, at the reviewing of several regiments he seemed very deep in thought, and being asked the reason, by one that stood by, he replied, I was thinking I am capable of commanding these brave fellows, and do not care that either they or I should receive orders from a woman. The Queen immediately resigned the regency, and Charles took upon him the government, and was crowned the December following.

Three powerful princes, namely, the King of Denmark, the Elector of Saxony and the Czar of Muscovy, taking advantage of his youth, began to conspire his ruin. This greatly alarmed Charles's

council, who being assembled, and he with them, in their deliberations they were for averting the impending storm by negotiations ; upon which Charles rising from his seat said, I am resolved never to enter upon an unjust war, nor never to put an end to a just one, but by the destruction of my enemies : My resolution is fixed, I will attack the first that shall declare war against me, and when I have conquered him, I may hope to strike a terror into the rest. These words astonished them all, and daring to make no reply, received the King's orders for war with admiration.

He set out upon his first campaign in 1700, and never returned to Stockholm afterwards ; the Danish force consisted of its own troops, joined by Saxon troops belonging to the King of Poland from Brandenburg, Wolfenbuttle, and Hesse Cassel ; and the Swedes consisted of eight thousand of its own men, joined by the troops of Hanover, Zell, and three Dutch regiments, which embarked on board ships, and met Charles at an appointed station. When they came up with the Danish fleet, it declined engaging them

and sheered off; which gave them an opportunity of drawing so near Copenhagen, as to throw some bombs into the town. This success so emulated Charles, that he proposed with his troops taking the city by land, while the fleet blocked it by sea; this was agreed to; five thousand men were ordered to embark, who lay on the coast of Sweden, and were joined to the troops they had on board. The King entered into a light frigate, and dispatched three hundred grenadiers in small shallops towards the shore, carrying the facines, the chevaux de frize, and the instruments for the pioneers; after them five hundred men in other vessels; then came the King's men of war, with two English frigates, and two Dutch, which were to favour the descent with their cannon. On the unexpected movement of the vessels, the inhabitants were in a great consternation, and placed their men behind the intrenchments, at the place which most threatened the storm. The King, impatient to land, threw himself into the sea, with his sword in his hand, an hundred yards off the shore, and waded through the water above his

middle : in which example he was followed by most of his nobles who attended him ; and they all marched amidst a shower of musket shot, which the Danes discharged. The King, who had never in his life before heard a discharge of muskets loaded with balls, asked what whistling that was which he heard in his ears ? On being told it was the noise of musket balls, which they were firing on him : That's right, says he, henceforth it shall be my music. And that moment a shot took off the head of the person he was talking to, who fell down dead at his feet.

The Danish horse and foot took to their heels ; and as soon as the King was master of their intrenchments, he fell on his knees, and thanked God for his success. He then marked out the encampment, and sent on board for nine thousand fresh recruits, whom a favourable wind the next morning brought to him.

All this passed within sight of the Danish fleet, who durst not venture to interpose ; and the inhabitants in a fright sent deputies to the King, to intreat him not to bombard the town ; he received them

on horseback at the head of his guards; and the deputies fell down on their knees before him; he demanded of the town four hundred thousand rix dollars, with orders to supply his camp with all sorts of provisions, which he promised they should be honestly paid for. They however brought him the provisions, not expecting the payment, but were astonished to find the money ready for them by the meanest foldier. There was strict discipline observed in the camp, no one dared refuse paying for what they had; and the dead were not stripped till the King gave orders for the same. Prayers were constantly read twice a day, at the which the King always attended, giving his soldiers an example of his piety, as well as his valour. His camp had more plenty than the town, for the country people chose rather to sell to their enemies the Swedes, than to their own countrymen, who did not pay so well for them. And the citizens were more than once obliged to fetch those provisions from the King of Sweden's camp, which they wanted in their own markets.

The King of Denmark, then at Holf-

tein, raising the siege of Toningen; and on seeing the Baltic covered with his enemy's ships, and the head town of his own capital ready to be taken possession of by a conqueror, he published a declaration, That whosoever would take up arms against the Swedes, should have their liberty; this was of great weight in the country, where all the peasants and many of the townspeople were slaves; but Charles feared not this army, and let them know, that he must either do justice to the Duke of Holstein, (on whose behalf Charles had begun this war.) or he should see Copenhagen destroyed, and his kingdom put to fire and sword. The issue of this threat was the calling a congress, which terminated in putting an end to the war, to the advantage of the Duke of Holstein, who was indemnified for all the expences of the war, and delivered from oppression. The King of Sweden would not accept of any thing, being satisfied with relieving his ally, and humbling his enemy.

Thus Charles XII. at eighteen years of age, began and ended a war in less than six weeks.

At the same time the King of Poland laid siege to Riga in person, which was defended by a Swedish general of eighty years of age, and who had served in sixty campaigns; but the town being full of Dutch goods, the siege was raised on the representation of the States General.

This siege being raised, Charles saw it expedient to go against the Czar Peter Albomwitx, who had ravaged Ingria with 100,000 men, and had appeared at Narva, at the head of this great army, in the most inclement season of the year, where he marked out a camp, raised redoubts, and opened the trenches himself; but on receiving information that the King of Sweden had crossed the sea with two hundred transports, to deliver the town, he raised 40,000 recruits to stop his progress, hastening their march to the place where he expected the king would land; also detached 20,000 men from the siege at Narva, and planted them along the King of Sweden's road, who must necessarily force their way through all those troops before they could reach the camp, which was fortified with a double rampart and fosses.

The King of Sweden soon landed in the Gulph of Riga, with 16000 foot, and 4000 horse, and made a flying march to Revel with his horse, and 4000 of his foot, where he furiously attacked the first posts of the enemy, who thinking the whole Swedish army was coming upon them, fled away very precipitately, and the King gained the advanced posts one by one, untill he in a few days appeared with his 8000 men before a camp of 150 pieces of brass cannon in the front. And though wearied with so long a march, Charles gave them scarcely time for rest, but gave orders for the attack without delay.

As soon as the cannon of the Swedes had made a breach in the intrenchments, they advanced with their bayonets at the end of their fuses, and by a violent fall of snow were driven to the very face of the enemy; who stood their fire about half an hour. The King attacked the Czar's quarters, hoping for a re-encounter, but he was gone in quest of an aid of 40000 men, who were daily expected.—Upon the first discharge of the enemies shot, the King received a ball in his left shoul-

der, but it grazed only in a slight manner upon his flesh; and his activity even hindered him from perceiving that he was wounded. Presently after his horse was killed from under him. A second had his head carried off by a cannon ball; and as he was mounting a third, these fellows, says he, make me exercise! and then went to engage and give orders with the same presence of mind as before. In about three hours the entrenchments were carried on all sides, and the King with 4000 men pursued 50000, and in the fright the bridge broke down, and the river was in a moment covered with the dead; while some in despair returned to their camp, posting themselves between some barracks, where they defended themselves for a while, not knowing how to make their escape; and at last were obliged to surrender themselves, and lay their arms at his Majesty's feet; which example was soon followed by the General of the army, and fifty of the other officers. In the mean time night came on, and the left wing of the enemy still continuing fighting, the Swedes having

lost 1500 men, and the Muscovites above 18,000. The King employed the small remains of the day in seizing upon the enemy's artillery; he posted himself to advantage behind the camp and town, and there slept some hours on the ground, wrapped up in his cloak, expecting at daybreak to fall on the left wing of the enemy, who was not yet entirely routed. But at two of the clock in the morning, General Wade, who commanded that wing, surrendered to the conqueror, with about 30,000 Muscovites, who marched, soldiers and officers, before 000 Swedes, the soldiers as they went along throwing down their fuses and swords upon the ground, and the officers presenting them with their ensigns and colours. In the morning the King caused them all to cross a river, without retaining a prisoner, and entered victorious into Narva, attended by the Muscovite general officers, to whom he returned their swords, and gave the commander in chief a thousand ducats, and every inferior officer five hundred. Thus Charles gained a complete victory over another of his combined enemies; who, by reason of his youth,

thought to have crushed him and his kingdom to atoms.

The King of Poland expecting that Charles would next vent his fury upon him, entered into a league more strict than ever with the Czar, and to consult measures the better, they had an interview at Bersen; and the King of Sweden engaged a Scotch Nobleman at that place as a spy, who by his address got into the conferences of the two princes, and got acquainted with their secrets, the import of which he always immediately sent to the King.

The King of Poland not being able to engage the Dutch in his quarrel, determined to ask peace of the King of Sweden, and as it was a nice affair, he entrusted it to the Countess Koninsmark, a Swedish lady, famous in the world for her wit and beauty. She came to the camp in Lithuania, and waited on the road till the King rode out to take the air; when he came by she stepped out of her coach, resolving to speak to him, but as soon as the King saw her, he made her a low bow, without speaking one

word to her, turned the bridle of his horse, and rode back in an instant. So that she gained no other advantage from her journey than the satisfaction of believing that the King of Sweden feared nobody but her.

The King of Poland therefore not being able to obtain peace, fled from Warsaw, where the King of Sweden soon arrived, and the gates were opened to him on the first summons. He immediately sent away the Polish garrison, dismissed the city guards, and placed his own in the town, ordered the inhabitants to bring in their arms, and demanded a contribution of 100,000 franks.—The King of Poland was then getting all his forces together at Cracow, to which place the King of Sweden went, where the two Kings met, and 20,000 Swedes beat 32,000 Saxons; after which the King of Poland hastily, with the scattered remains of his troops, retired unto Thorn, which very soon after surrendered to the Swedes. For this ill success, the King of Poland was pronounced incapable of wearing the crown any longer; he therefore vacated it, and withdrew to Saxony. Soon after

Stanislaus was crowned in the presence of the King of Sweden, and a peace confirmed.

In the mean while 10,000 Muscovites on one side, and some Saxon troops on the other, burnt and ravaged the estates of the new King Stanislaus; but Charles and he fell on them in separate bodies, and overcame them. If Charles found a river to be an impediment in his way, he and his men would swim their horses over it. The baggage of the deposed King was taken, in which were 200,000 crowns and 800,000 ducats, belonging to the Muscovite General. Charles, at the head of his horse, would often march thirty leagues in twenty-four hours, every soldier leading another horse in his hand, to mount when his own was weary.

While Charles was driving the Muscovites, a body of 20000 Saxon passed the Oder, and gave battle to a small body of half that number of Charles's troops; but after a smart engagement surrendered to the Swedes.

Charles soon after fell in with a body of 10,000 horse, and 6000 foot, he not

having 4000 with him. He broke in upon their ranks, they fled, but some being hid in the hollow ways came out and surrounded his Majesty and his army. The King's horse was slain under him, and as one was presenting him with another, both man and horse were struck dead on the spot; so he was obliged to fight on foot, encircled by some of his officers, who flew to relieve him by surrounding him. Several of them were taken, wounded, or slain, and the King left with but five about him. He was quite spent with fatigue, having killed above a dozen of the enemy with his own hand, without receiving so much as one wound; at last a Colonel came up with his company and relieved him, and put all the Tartars to the sword. The army recovered its rank, Charles mounted his horse, and fatigued as he was, pursued the Muscovites, and won five battles with them, and laid siege to Pultowa, on the river Vorstot. In the course of the siege a carbine shattered the bone of his heel, which he took no notice of; but one of his servants seeing his boot bloody, fetched a surgeon to him, who

on examining it said, The leght might be saved by deep incisions. Fall to work then, said the king, cut boldly, fear nothing. He held his leg himself, and seemed no more affected with the operation than if it had been performed on another person. While they were dressing it, he gave orders for an assault the next morning; but just thereon word was brought that the Czar appeared with an army of 70,000 men.

A few days after was fought the decisive battle betwixt the king and the Czar, in which Charles was entirely defeated, 9000 Swedes killed, 6000 taken prisoners, his baggage, and six millions of money, together with all the spoils he had taken in Saxony, and he obliged to fly away precipitately. In his flight his coach broke down, and he wandered all night in a wood; the pain of his wound increasing, and his spirits being exhausted, he rested himself at the foot of a tree, at the hazard of being surpris'd every moment by his enemies, who sought him on every side. He was obliged to take shelter in Turkey, but was soon ordered to remove, by messengers from the Grand

Turk ; he told the messengers to go about their business, or he would shave their beards for them ; which was the most provoking affront he could put upon 'em. The house he was then in was immediately surrounded by 300 Turks, who soon surrendered to twenty Swedes ; the King then went to his own house, where 200 Turks had got in at a window ; he and his followers entered with pistol and sword in hand, and were assailed by the Janissaries on all sides, of whom they killed and wounded many. A ball from a Janissary grazed the King's nose, took off a piece of his ear, and the arm of a General that stood by him ; to revenge which, he plunged his sword in the Janissary's breast ; but they barricaded him and his attendants in his chamber, and fell to plundering the house ; which so provoked the prisoners, that they burst open the doors, and furiously pursued the plunderers, killing some, while others jumped out of the window. Another party then surrounded the house, and set fire to it, on which one of the King's attendants said, it was time to surrender — What a strange man is this, says the King,

to imagine it was not more glorious to be burned than taken prisoners! Another said, 'hat the Chancery House, which was but fifty paces off, had a stone roof, and was proof against fire; that it would be well to sally out and gain that house, and there stand on their defence. A true Swede! said the King, embracing him, Come on my friends, said he, take the Chancery house sword in hand. On this they rushed out, but Charles having his boots on fell down, when they took and carried him away to the Bathaw's quarters, some taking hold of his arms, and others of his legs; and from thence he was carried prisoner to Demittocea.

After some years stay in Turkey, King Charles returned into Sweeden, and laid siege to Frederickshall, in Norway; the cold was so extreme, that they might as well have broken a rock as opened the trenches, but as their King set them the example, they never failed to follow him, for he was hardened in constitution by his long and frequent campaigns, that he would sleep in the open field in the midst of winter, on the boards or straw, covered only with his cloak, without prejudicing

his health. Several soldiers were killed with the cold, but durst not complain on seeing what their King suffered. A little before this he heard of a woman who had lived several months on water only; this made him resolve to try how long he was able to fast; so he neither eat nor drank for five days, and on the morning of the sixth he got up and rode two leagues, then alighted and eat heartily, without feeling the least disorder for his long abstinence. These extraordinary abilities could not chuse but make him dreaded by all.

On the 21st of December he went at night to see the trenches, and stood with half his body exposed to a battery of cannon which was directly opposite, and ing pretty smart; on a sudden the king dropped, fetching a deep sigh; two of his attendants ran to him, but he was already dead; a ball of half a pound had struck him on the right temple, and made a hole big enough for one to run their fingers in; his head lying over the parapet, the left eye was beat in, and the right was forced out of its socket; he was dead the moment he received this;

but he had the force in that instant to put his hand by a natural motion to the guard of his sword, and lay in that warlike posture.

Thus fell Charles XII. King of Sweden, at the age of thirty-six years and a half, having known the extremes of prosperity and adversity; without being softened by one, or the least disturbed by the other. All his actions, even those of private life, are beyond any measure of probability. Perhaps he was the only man (to be sure he was the only King,) who ever lived without weakness. He carried all the virtues of a hero to that excess that they became as dangerous as any of the opposite vices. His resolution, grown to obstinacy, occasioned his misfortunes in the Ukraine, and kept him five years in Turkey. His liberality degenerating into profusion, ruined Sweden. His courage growing into rashness was the occasion of his death. His justice: as been sometimes cruelty; and in his latter years the maintaining of his prerogative was not short of tyranny. His great qualities, any one of which had been enough to make another prince immortal, were a misfortune to his

country. He never began a quarrel with any, but he was rather implacable than otherwise in his resentment. He was the first who ever had the ambition to be a conqueror without wishing to increase his dominions. His desire to gain kingdoms was only that he might give them away. The passion he had for glory, for war, and for revenge, made him too little of a politician, without which the world never saw a prince or a conqueror. Before a battle he was full of confidence, exceeding modest after a victory, and in a defeat undaunted. Sparing no other no more than himself, he made a small account of his own and subjects lives, or labours; a man extraordinary, rather than great man; and fitter to be admired than imitated. His life however may be a lesson to Kings, and teach them, that peaceable and happy government is more to be desired than so much glory. He was tall and nobly shaped, he had a fine forehead, large blue eyes, full of sweetness, and a handsome nose; but the lower part of his face was disagreeable, and often disfigured by a frequent laugh, which hardly opened his lips; he had little beard or

hair ; spoke little, and it was habitual to him to answer only with a laugh. At his table there was always great silence. With all that inflexible temper of his, he was timorous and bashful, and would have been at a loss in conversation ; for having given himself wholly up to war, he knew but little of society. As to his religion, though the sentiments of a prince ought not to influence those of other men ; and the opinion of a King so little informed as Charles, can be of no great weight in such matters ; yet it is proper that men's curiosity should be satisfied in this particular, as well as others concerning him. Charles was a serious Lutheran for some years, till he saw the famous philosopher Monsieur Leibnitz at Leipfick ; who was a very great free thinker, and talked very freely, having instilled his notions into more princes than one. Charles learned from the conversation of this philosopher a great deal of indifference for Lutheranism ; which he carried much farther afterwards, when he had more time in Turkey, and had seen so many sorts of professions. Of all his old opinions he retained but one, which was absolute

Predestination ; a doctrine which favoured his courage, and justified his temerity.

As soon as he was dead, the siege was raised, and the Swedes made peace with all their neighbours, and put an end to absolute power, proceeding to the free election of Charles's sister for their queen, who renouncing all hereditary right to it, she yielded it to her husband, the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel, and brought the States to chuse him, who ascended the throne on this condition, viz That for ever hereafter the election of a King of Poland shou'd be by the free choice of the people.

F I N I S.



